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ACTS 19:8-41

In our study of the **Book of Acts**, we've seen that everywhere Paul went, he preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everywhere Paul went, he preached that man is a sinner and he needs a Savior and the only One who can save man is Jesus Christ. Everywhere Paul went, he sought to bring men and women into the kingdom of God.

And when Paul came to Ephesus, he didn't change his message. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ...he knew it was the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Well, today's lesson finds Paul doing exactly what he did everywhere...Paul is in the synagogue...**reasoning with the Jews and persuading those who would listen about the kingdom of God.**

As usual, Paul's message was offensive to the Jews and **verse 9** tells us they became hardened and disobedient and began to speak evil of "the Way" and when they began to speak evil of "the Way" Paul withdrew from them. What was "the Way"? It was the way of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul would later write that the natural man does not accept the things of God because they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because the things of God are spiritually appraised.

Paul would also later write that we don't war according to the flesh, but our warfare is spiritual.

And this is what Paul was facing as he preached Jesus in the synagogue at Ephesus. Paul was waging war against man-made ideas and philosophies and traditions. The Jews were not willing to give these things up and when they started speaking evil of the salvation Paul was presenting to them, Paul simply withdrew.

Paul took with him those who had accepted the truth he preached and he began teaching in the school of Tyrannus...and he did this for two full years. Tyrannus is thought to have been a Greek philosopher and he apparently allowed Paul to use his meeting place when he wasn't using it, and as a result of Paul's faithful, persistent teaching and preaching, **verse 10** tells us that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Verses 11-12...

God wasn't performing **ordinary** miracles through Paul. He was performing **extraordinary** miracles. These were mighty manifestations of God's power. God used even Paul's handkerchief or his aprons in these miracles of healing the sick and evil spirits.

We saw last week certain things that were unique to that time in the history of the early church, and I believe that this is another... And I believe when we hear of men today who claim that if you send for their prayer cloths that they will have miraculous powers, you best be very cautious and very skeptical...

Again, the **Book of Acts** is **not** a book of doctrine. It is a book of church history. Certain things that happened in that time are not for today. Nowhere do we see the ministry of prayer cloths taught in the epistles, do we?

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The fact is, however, that **Paul's** handkerchiefs and aprons were used by God to bring healing to bodies and minds!!

Verse 13...

Well, word got around that the name of Jesus was powerful. So...these Jewish exorcists began to drive out demons "in the name of Jesus."

(Like Simon the sorcerer, they wanted the power of Jesus, but they didn't want Jesus.)

Verse 14-15...

The evil spirits indeed knew Jesus. They knew Him and they trembled at His name. They knew Him as the Holy One of God. They knew all about His virgin birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, His triumphant resurrection and His glorious ascension. **THEY KNEW JESUS!!**

When the demon said, "Jesus I **know**"...he used the Greek word that means "**to know by experience**". And he knew by experience that he was no match for the Lord Jesus!

The word he used in connection with Paul was the Greek word that means "**to know as a result of prolonged attention.**" This demon had paid attention to Paul and he knew Paul was not to be taken lightly...he knew that the Jesus he knew and trembled at was the One who empowered Paul!

So, this demon knew if the sons of Sceva were coming against him in no power except their own, he could take care of them in short order and he did!

Let me ask you...do demons have power today?

Listen to this story told to me by a friend:

A young boy was doing yard work for Andy and some other folks. This young boy's mother was approached by another boy's mother. She told the mother of Andy's yard boy that Andy's yard boy would have to get her son a job, too.

Well, the mother of Andy's yard boy couldn't do that. So, the woman who had approached her went to a witch doctor and the witch doctor mixed up a potion and that night the woman poured this potion on the porch of Andy's yard boy's mother's home.

The next day, she walked out of her house, not knowing of this curse and fell out on the porch. Well, her legs swelled up three times the normal size.

Now, it's hard for us to believe this...but this is a man of God, and he deals with this type of thing on a daily basis as a missionary in South Africa.

Verses 17-20...

The folks at Ephesus learned there was indeed power in the name of Jesus! There is **soul-saving, demon-conquering, life-transforming** power in the name of Jesus! But it was no name to banter around...as the seven sons of Sceva found out!

The Gospel Paul was preaching began reaping great results...

Folks began believing and confessing and giving up their sin

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of magic and the occult. They began burning their books and **verse 19** tells us the value of their books was fifty thousand pieces of silver.

(By the way...did you notice that **many** of the believers burned their books... What does this tell you? I believe Luke is telling us that **most** did, but not all. These believers are no different than believers today. Some are completely committed to following the Lord Jesus wholeheartedly from the very beginning...some take a little longer. But I truly believe that if we see folks who **profess** to being believers in the Lord Jesus and **NEVER** put away the things they were holding onto before...then we have to wonder if their "belief" was genuine, saving belief, or merely belief as the demons have.)

What happened at Ephesus? Before the Gospel of the Lord Jesus came to Ephesus, it was a city gripped by Satan. Satan must have had a field day in Ephesus!!!

Darkness had taken over...spiritual darkness. Demonic activity was everywhere in Ephesus, but the folks who came to true saving faith in Jesus in Ephesus found out that *greater is He who was in them than he who is in the world, didn't they?*

Let me ask you...what would be burned if the Holy Spirit's conviction swept the church today? I believe certain **magazines** or **novels** would be quietly removed from our homes. I believe certain **television channels** would be boycotted. ***Some of us would ask others to pray that we would be set free from whatever is dragging us down.***

I want to encourage all of us to take inventory. Is there anything in your life that doesn't need to be there? Let this new month of this new year of this new millennium be the year you get rid of it!!

Verses 23-27...

As we said at the beginning of our lesson today, Paul preached that Jesus is the only way to God, and as he preached this message over and over, he won more and more folks to faith in Christ.

Artemis was actually the ancient "mother goddess" of Asia Minor. Her temple at Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artemis was a fertility goddess and her image was a ***grotesque multi-breasted*** female figure.

The Ephesian silversmiths were making a very lucrative living by manufacturing miniature silver shrines that contained the image of Artemis. These little shrines were purchased by those who believed in Artemis so that they could take them to the Temple and get Artemis to bless them. They could have them sitting around their home as objects of their worship.

Well, the impact of Paul's preaching the Gospel was so great that the demand for these little shrines had fallen off dramatically.

You know, that's what Christianity should do everywhere, shouldn't it? The power of the Gospel should be so evident that the businesses that deal in sin should feel threatened.

I mean, pornography shops and abortion clinics, casinos and the liquor business...all should not only *feel* threatened but *be* threatened. The entertainment industry should **feel pressured to go back to good, clean, wholesome entertainment.**

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But, I'm afraid it's not like that today. I believe the Gospel has lost **none** of **its** power ...but I believe the Christians have. We just don't have the impact on our society that these Ephesians Christians had on theirs, **but we do have some...**and as corrupt as our society is right now...think **how much more** corrupt it would be without the salt and light of the Christians in our country!!

I want us to think for the next few minutes of the arguments Demetrius put forth in the passage we just read.

First, Demetrius appealed to **numbers**...he said Artemis is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world. In other words... **"everybody's doing it..."**

Next, Demetrius appealed to **emotion**, so much so that the crowd became stirred up and began shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The Ephesians were very proud of their shrine to Artemis. It was, as we said, a wonder of the ancient world. It was a national monument. It was a source of great pride as well as a source of income for them.

See, when Paul preached in Ephesus, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen didn't quarrel with his doctrine. Their anger boiled because his preaching threatened their profits. Greed was the real passion...the real emotion behind the riot, but in order to soften that, he appealed to their patriotism. He wanted these folks to see themselves as patriotic heroes for opposing the teaching of Paul.

Things haven't changed, have they? These are exactly the ways wrongdoing is defended in our day, isn't it?

Think about it...it used to be that on newscasts, especially newscasts by the major networks, what we got was **real news**...things that were really happening!

Now, the results of opinion polls are reported as if they were news. Not long ago we heard things like this...

"NBC conducted an opinion poll this week, and 68% of the American people believe the President is telling the truth," or "2% think he's lying and 98% think he's telling the truth."

What was your response to this? At our house we said, "Who cares?" The point is not how many people **think** a government figure is lying, but **is** he lying?

Television is not only in the opinion **taking** business, but television is also in the opinion **forming** business, and the opinions they're forming have influenced the moral decay of our country.

Demetrius was saying, "everybody worships Artemis!" **But, were they?** Not everybody in Ephesus worshiped Artemis. Paul didn't. The people Paul had won to faith in Christ didn't. But, even if everybody did, that alone didn't make Artemis a goddess, nor did it make her worshipers right.

And by the same token...just because the situation comedies on television and the talk shows on television tell us that everybody is living a promiscuous and/or perverted lifestyle...this doesn't mean everybody **is** living that kind of lifestyle...and even if they are, **DOES IT MAKE IT RIGHT??**

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You've all heard this...

"Everything is relative. There are really no absolutes. There is really no truth. You have your truth...I have my truth. Everybody has his or her own truth. I'm okay...you're okay."

Well, that just makes everybody feel better about their own sin, doesn't it?

Not only did Demetrius say that **everybody was doing it**, but the other tactic he used was **emotion**.

I hate to keep harping on television, but have you ever stopped to think that TV commercials appeal to our emotions? Now, I don't recall any commercials that appeal to our patriotism, but they do appeal to other emotions.

Do you remember in the "olden days" when Ivory soap's slogan was **"99 and 44/100% pure...and it floats"**? What did that suggest to you? It suggested to you that Ivory soap floated because it was purer than other soaps. Granted, the commercial didn't say this, but our emotions said, **"My goodness, I certainly do want to be using the purest soap on the market..."**

Folks, Ivory soap didn't float because it was purer than other soaps, it floated because it had air bubbles in it!

Many of our commercials are like that today, aren't they? Except they're worse...they appeal to our baser emotions, don't they? Images of sex and greed and success are used in today's commercials. These commercials tell us that we'll appeal to the opposite sex if we wear a certain brand of perfume or use a certain brand of toothpaste...or that we'll be successful (or at least perceived as successful) if we have certain things in our possession.

What they're really saying is "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is the American economy! Great is materialism! Look at her benefits! Look at her pleasure! Worship at this shrine!"

It takes a lot of courage (and sound thinking) to stand firm when the majority are going the other way. But it is only the people who stand up against the crowd who make a difference. The world is never changed by the **majority**...the world is changed by the **minority** who listen to the Holy Spirit and go the way He directs!!

Well, what was the outcome of all this?
Verses 29-41...

Our amazing God was in control all the time! He would have been in control even if Paul and his friends had perished. While all the shouting was going on, **God was moving the local officials like checkers**. At the perfect psychological moment, when the crowd had shouted itself out, God used a pagan city official, a stickler for law and order to bring the mob to its senses. A simple accomplishment...if you're God!!

The town clerk (the city mayor) came forward and calmed the crowd. He in essence told these folks that the Christians had done nothing wrong and if they wanted to lodge any legal complaints they should go to court to do so. And then he just dismissed the assembly.

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Of course, it didn't always turn out like this, did it? Christians were not always vindicated. Many were martyred. But they were martyred standing for truth and righteousness and the Gospel of Jesus Christ! They weren't swayed by public opinion polls or emotionalism.

What about Artemis? It's no exaggeration to say there isn't anyone who worships "Artemis of the Ephesians."
But there are millions who worship the Lord Jesus Christ and are even willing to die for Him.

Paul preached Jesus and when folks hear the Gospel with an open heart and an open mind, it will bring conviction. The Ephesians were convicted that what they had been worshiping was an exercise in futility.

And may I say to you that worship of anything apart from Almighty God is an exercise in futility.

There's a chapter over in *Isaiah...chapter 46...* that contrasts idolatry with Almighty God. This chapter is great...go home and read it this afternoon.

The message of this chapter is that an idol must be carried by its worshiper. But our God carries us. God says He has carried us from the womb, but He goes on to say,

"...even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you. I shall bear you and I shall deliver you."

Now, doesn't that speak to you...I mean the part about old age and graying years???

Another thing this chapter tells us about idols is that an idol cannot answer. It cannot deliver the worshiper from his distress.

But, Almighty God says,

"I am God, there is no one like Me...My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure..."

He goes on to say,

"Truly I have spoken, truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

Artemis could do nothing for the Ephesians except corrupt them. Our idols can do nothing for us except corrupt us.

But the God whom Paul preached to the Ephesians...the God these folks were far from until the blood of Jesus brought them near, could hear them and speak to them and order their days and guide them and establish all His good pleasure in them...

This is what they found out when they gave their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ...and this is what we find out, as well.

The church at Ephesus would play a prominent role in church history for several centuries and we're going to see more of it next week.